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ABSTRACT

An inservice program for doctoral composition specialists should train the teaching fellow to teach composition at a variety of levels, to administer writing programs, and to supervise writing clinics. It should also encourage teaching fellows to recognize the study and teaching of composition as fertile areas for research and scholarship and it should prepare its fellows for entry into the job market. The foundation of such an inservice program is a clear and precise written statement of the university and departmental policies and curriculum for composition. Other crucial elements are preservice training, a mentor assigned to each fellow, and a "how-to-teach-composition-in-college" course. Evaluation of the fellow should include direct observation by an experienced faculty member, student evaluation, and an overall teaching report based on mentor report, performance in methods class, observation reports, student evaluations, and evaluation of theme grading. (TJ)

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The Purpose of the In-Service Program for Graduate Students

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Until recently, the idea of preparing doctoral composition specialists was regarded by many people in college English departments as anti-traditional, unnecessary, and entirely too "teacher education" oriented. But now, with the recent concern for the quality of student writing which has been expressed both within the university and outside of it, no one needs to be convinced of the need for such a specialization. Previously, of course, doctoral students were trained almost exclusively as literary scholars, as their professors had been, but there is no evidence that such students are themselves good writers or, more important, that they will be good teachers of writing--even admitting considerable uncertainty in education about how to recognize either good teaching or good writing. In the future, however, most, if not all, of their teaching after graduation will be in composition; during the current school year, the number of advertised positions in composition has outnumbered those in literature by probably ten to one, and most of the few literature positions are combined with substantial amounts of composition teaching.

Thus, the value of being a teacher in higher education has now been established--belatedly--as not only worthwhile, but also as a necessary and desirable goal, both because of its relationship to the doctoral graduate's likely professional

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future and because of the re-emphasis on the teaching of writing as the primary function of the college English department. This function until recently had, of course, been relegated to graduate assistants, doctoral fellows, and part-time, non-tenure track instructors who often were thrown without preparation, assistance, or encouragement into this difficult and time-consuming assignment only as a means of providing them with jobs or of financing their graduate studies.

Today we realize that there should be a strong relationship between the teaching fellows' roles as students and their roles as teachers, since the primary purpose of an in-service program is not the acquisition of knowledge, important though the academic component is, but the acquisition of a skill: how to teach students to write. The in-service program, then, should train the teaching fellow to teach composition at a variety of levels, to administer writing programs, and to supervise writing clinics or tutorial programs. In addition, the program should encourage teaching fellows to recognize the study and teaching of composition as fertile areas for research and scholarship, especially since this field will probably provide the professional life work for most of them. Finally, such a program should prepare its fellows for entry into the job market as well-prepared as they can possibly be, and should assist them in job placement. Obviously, it is difficult to incorporate all of these goals equally well into an in-service program, but, based on my experience in one such well-established and highly-regarded program, I will offer some ideas about how it might be achieved.

The foundation of any in-service program is a clear and precise written statement of the university-wide or departmental policies and curriculum for composition. Teaching fellows need to know what is expected of them as instructors whose effectiveness in the classroom is going to be evaluated. At Ball State University, this statement is provided not only for teaching fellows but also for the undergraduate students whom they instruct in the form of a thirty page booklet entitled Standards in General Education English which presents the departmental philosophy of composition, the relationship of the freshman writing program to the university's general education curriculum, and specific standards respecting such matters as theme grading, individual conferences, and manuscript preparation as well as information about the writing clinic, sample graded themes, and condensed syllabi for the courses in the composition sequence. Such material is extremely helpful in clarifying the criteria by which both the teaching fellows and their students are to be evaluated.

The next element in the in-service program is pre-service training. Most schools have spring application deadlines for their doctoral programs, and as soon as candidates are admitted, they should also be notified of their teaching responsibilities. They should be given copies of the textbooks and other materials which they are expected to use, as well as copies of the policy or curriculum standards. Before the school year begins, the director of composition and his staff should conduct an orientation workshop for new teaching fellows; at Ball State, this workshop focuses on practical matters which will be of immediate concern to the teaching fellows from the first day that they

meet their students: how to construct a syllabus, how to make assignments, and how to grade themes, for example.

A third facet of the in-service program is the assignment of each new teaching fellow to a mentor, either a faculty member or an experienced and well-qualified teaching fellow. The mentor meets regularly with the teaching fellow to discuss his/her work, answer questions, provide assistance and encouragement in dealing with problems that may have arisen, and give immediate evaluation of the fellow's progress. In our program, all the mentors are also members of the General Education Committee which oversees the entire freshman writing program, so they provide the teaching fellows with a direct link to the policy-making and personnel evaluation body within the program. The mentor system works well if early communication and rapport are established between the mentor and his assigned teaching fellow. If the fellow has difficulty with some aspects of his/her teaching during the first year, he/she may request or may be assigned to a mentor in subsequent years, although this is not necessary for the majority of the fellows.

The heart of the teaching fellows' first year program, aside from their actual teaching experience, is the "how to teach composition in college" course which they are required to take. At Ball State, this course is taught either by the director of composition or by a faculty member of the General Education Committee. This is not a course in advanced composition or in rhetorical theory; rather, based on the assumption that the best way to learn to teach is by example, the course instructs and guides the fellows in how to teach the course which they are actually

teaching at the time. By relating the course directly to the fellows' current teaching, the professor is able to provide them with a practical working model which they are then encouraged to alter and improve to fit their own individual teaching styles rather than to imitate slavishly. In the course, the fellows discuss how to teach a variety of materials which they will be using, they take quizzes similar to those which they will administer to their students, and they are assigned to write themes with the same limitations of focus and time as those imposed on students, so that they can better understand the composition problems with which their students are confronted. This course is valuable both to the fellows who have little or no prior composition teaching experience and are uncertain about what to do, and to those who have experience but have not taught previously in this specific school or department.

Since student teaching is generally accepted as the most valuable part of the undergraduate teacher education curriculum, it is not surprising that the actual teaching experience of the fellows, adequately prepared for by the pre-service orientation and the methods class, and supervised by the director of composition, the mentors, and the committee, is the most valuable facet of the in-service program. The fellows' teaching loads during the first year should be light and the number of different preparations to which they are assigned should be limited so that they can devote sufficient time to their academic work and teaching responsibilities. Teaching assignments should begin with the basic composition courses, with those fellows whose teaching is judged to be superior allowed to teach a variety of classes later.

Our better fellows are assigned to teach not only basic composition, but also developmental courses, experimental sections in our residential college, and honors classes so that their experience is broad; a reward for improved or consistently high quality performance is, thus, built into the system. Many schools, including mine, allow several years of residency for doctoral students, so they have an opportunity to teach a variety of courses as well as to perfect their skills by teaching them repeatedly.

In the interest of fairness and objectivity, the teaching fellow's effectiveness should be evaluated in a variety of ways; each of these ways is intended not only to evaluate the fellow, but, more important, also to help him/her improve as a classroom teacher. The first of these evaluation methods is direct observation of teaching which, at Ball State, is always conducted by the director of composition but which could be shared by the mentors or other faculty members of the General Education Committee. Ideally, a fellow should be observed numerous times so that the faculty member may judge the fellow's ability in several situations. After each observation, the faculty member should provide the teaching fellow with an immediate written and verbal evaluation so that the classroom activities conducted are still fresh and clear in their minds.

The second form of evaluation is student evaluation. Recognizing as we do the pitfalls inherent in student evaluation, teaching fellows should be required to use a carefully-constructed evaluation instrument which will reflect as accurately as possible how their students assess their teaching competency. Our evaluation forms are designed especially for each composition course and

provide not only check-off ratings of the teaching fellow, but also opportunity for students to make written evaluative comments about the quality of instruction, to rate themselves as students in the class, to evaluate the textbooks and other course materials, and to comment on factors largely outside the fellow's control such as the curriculum or grading standards.

The final and most comprehensive evaluation of the teaching fellow is the overall teaching report compiled by the director of composition and the General Education Committee that incorporates all the individual forms of evaluation: mentor report, performance in methods class, observation reports, student evaluations, and evaluation of theme grading. All of these materials are assessed by the committee, and its overall evaluation of the fellow's progress as a teacher is presented to him/her in writing by the director of composition. This comprehensive evaluation is then discussed in a private conference among the teaching fellow, the department chairman, and the director of composition. This conference is not held solely for the purpose of evaluating the teaching fellow, however, for he/she is always encouraged to criticize the in-service program and to suggest changes which might improve it.

The willingness of the administrators to listen to and involve the teaching fellows in our program is one of its most positive attributes. Fellows who have previously received high evaluations are appointed to the General Education Committee and take a full and equal part in curricular decisions and in the evaluation of their peers; this makes it possible for the teaching fellows' perspective to be represented at the program's

policy-making level. Nor are these fellows exempt themselves from evaluation just because they have had high ratings in the past or are members of the committee. Membership on the committee also involves fellows in such administrative tasks as supervising the writing clinic, evaluating newly-published composition textbooks for possible adoption, and contributing to curricular decisions, all of which might well be a part of their professional assignments when they complete their doctorates and leave the program.

The final consideration of the in-service program is with job placement. The director of composition, in particular, probably knows a teaching fellow's potential as a college composition instructor or administrator better than anyone in the department's academic areas, and, of course, as we are all aware, academic excellence is not necessarily a predicter of teaching success. Thus, in a composition-oriented job market, the director's recommendation can be more detailed and serve as a better indication of a teaching fellow's likely professional success than anything else in his/her dossier. We have every reason to believe that prospective employers give considerable weight to such recommendations when they make hiring decisions.

None of this is meant to imply that such in-service programs as the one which I have described are free of problems; but the central concern is that such problems as do exist are identified and a serious and conscientious effort is made to eliminate or reduce them as much as possible. Again the involvement of the teaching fellows themselves is vitally important; at Ball State, for example, the teaching fellows requested that they be evaluated

in several of the manners now employed, and they were responsible for creating the original student evaluation instruments. In an in-service program, the teaching fellow's success as a teacher is as important as, and inextricably linked to, his/her success as a student, so soliciting and encouraging his/her suggestions for improving the program are very important in creating and maintaining an appropriate tone or atmosphere. The teaching fellows need to feel that, despite the intensive and extensive scrutinizing, supervising, and evaluating of them and their work, they are supported and encouraged by the director of composition and other administrators, and that these people want them to succeed as composition instructors and will work very hard to help them do so. Although some teaching fellows have difficulty adjusting to an in-service program's requirements, the majority do not, and those who do their jobs responsibly and well have no reason to fear supervision or evaluation, since these are intended as aids to help them improve their teaching capabilities.

Perhaps the most persuasive evidence of the merit of in-service programs is the success that graduates have in getting positions and in performing well as professionals. Trite though it may be, we <u>do</u> learn by doing--so long as that experience is properly prepared for and expertly supervised--and this is the ultimate value of the in-service program as it serves the most critical need in college English today: the need for faculty specialists in the teaching of writing.